

The Value of Continuing Education

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The choice to invest in education is something that varies from person to person, especially when it comes to continuing education beyond college. When discussing continuing education, this paper will be referring to graduate school, doctoral programs, and professional certificates. The choice to go college in America, then be accepted and to graduate, places you in a higher wage bracket than those who do not. In some cases, like in Pennsylvania, a person could be making 81% more with a college degree than a person who does not have one (Kiersz, 2019). If a person chooses to go beyond college, and they decide to go into graduate school, the choice is generally made because it is understood to be beneficial effects on a person's life such as being offered better pay, and overall better quality of life (Meyer, n.d., para 5). For example, those that have continued their education and received a master's degree or higher have a median weekly income of around \$1,400 to \$1,800 whereas those with a bachelor's degree are making a median weekly income of around \$1,200 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Thus, if one does choose to move forward with continuing their education, they have the ability to exponentially increase their monetary gains as well as their professional opportunity.

Even though knowing that continuing one's education could provide an overall better quality of life, not everyone goes ahead with making the choice to do so. The reasons why individuals may not move forward with that option could be because of the cost. Currently, in America those who are pursuing higher education are hit with some of the highest student loan debt ever, and the current debt is at 1.56 trillion dollars (Friedman, 2019). On top of that, the actual effect of taking on that kind of debt can lead to other negative factors such as missing housing payments as student debt increases, and that even overall health takes a decline due to the stress of having the debt (Despard et al., 2016, pp. 12-16). When it comes to continuing

education especially for graduate school, a person could be deterred from going that route since the average price for a graduate education could be anywhere between \$30,000 to \$40,000 or more (Ienatsch, 2019). There are also other factors that may keep people from continuing education such as college life expenses that might accompany continuing education like paying for technology or quality of life expenses like eating out all of which also adds to the overall expense of continuing education (Wilcox et al., 2019). The monetary obstacle is a problem, but does it actually deter more people from pursuing their education and does it negatively affect the perceived value of continuing education? That does not appear to be the case as a survey recorded that 73% of participants stated they would want to continue their education as a way to increase their earning potential (Truong, 2018). So, people know that while price is a problem it appears to be outweighed by the benefits. Furthermore, understanding continuing education's value to the public is important to understand because of how it represents what the working world values as prerequisites for entering a profession. Already there has been an increase in master's degrees because the job market is favoring it and giving it value since it has the ability to boost an individual's career (Lorenzo, 2019). This means that the way in which we value work for the future now depends on continuing education since the bar for success appears to be moving in the direction beyond just graduating from college.

The question that this paper examines is what is the value in continuing education? More specifically do people who have higher education, such as an undergraduate degree value continuing education more so than those who do not? The paper will present a survey that was conducted to get an understanding of how people feel about continuing their education, then analyze the survey and present the results and discussion on whether people value continuing

education and if having more education in one's life makes them appreciate continuing education.

Method

Participants

One hundred and thirteen participants took part in the study (34 males, 65 females, and 14 who did not disclose their gender). The majority of participants (15%) were aged between 22-23. Participants were (primarily) a collection of friends and family members. Additional participants were obtained via an email sent to co-workers and other individuals that were associated with the researchers. This email explained the purpose of the study and asked recipients to participate. Most participants were Caucasian (42%) and Latinx (35%).

Materials and Procedure

An online survey was used to collect data from March 12, 2020, until March 26, 2020¹. The survey contained 23 questions (see Appendix) and was divided into 3 sections: The importance of continuing education, benefits of continuing education, and the likelihood of continuing education. The first section, the importance of education, assessed how the participant feels about the importance of continuing education, an example question from this section was "Do you agree that continuing your education is necessary?". Next section, the benefits of continuing education examines how participants feel about the benefits of continuing education. An example question from this section was "Do you agree that continuing your education is beneficial to your career growth?". After that section is the section on the likelihood of continuing education, which wants to know if participants are actually going to pursue

¹ The master SPSS file was turned in by Roberto Copado.

continuing education and what they may pursue. An example question from this section was “How likely are you to pursue a Master's degree?”.

The majority of questions were answered via a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “Extremely likely” to “Extremely unlikely.” The number 1 on the scale is for “Extremely likely” and the 5 is for “Extremely unlikely”. The remaining questions followed the same example however used “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree”. Included in the survey were also a few open-ended questions.

Results

~~Data from four questions of the survey are presented in this section. The questions are “How important do you think continuing your education is?” “Do you agree that there is value in continuing your education?”, and “What is the highest level of your education?”. The questions were analyzed using correlation to see the relationship that the value of education and level of education have, and a one-sample *t* test was performed on the question “Do you agree that there is value in continuing your education?”. The open-ended question “What are your final thoughts on continuing education?” was also analyzed.~~

For the question “How important do you think continuing your education is?”, the majority of participants (75.2%) stated that they feel it is important to continue one's own education. When asked “What is the highest level of education you have completed?”, there were 19.8% that had a high school diploma or GED, 62.4% had a College/undergraduate degree, 16.8% had a graduate degree, and only 1% did not disclose their level of education. The participants in the survey valued continuing their education ($M = 1.51$, $SD = .610$). A one-sample *t* test indicated that this mean value was significantly different from the midpoint (neutral) value of 3.0, $t(100) = -24.5$, $p = .000$, indicating a significant preference of the survey

participants agreed that they value continuing their education. The analysis revealed that for 113 participants surveyed, there was a non-significant negative relationship between how a participant values education and their level of education ($r = -.064$, $p = .527$). When the participants answered the open-ended question about what their final thoughts were on continuing education, the participants generally gave favorable answers of “I think continuing education helps you prepare for situations in the future and it gives you new opportunities”. An interesting statement that also appeared in other forms as answers to the question was “It is prohibitively expensive”. So there was a feeling as well that cost was an obstacle to continuing their education.

Discussion

The general results from the analysis revealed that overall the participants do value continuing education. The one-sample t test showed that the participants were significantly in agreement with the idea that there is value in continuing education, the frequencies point out that the majority of participants perceived that it was important to continue education and in the open-ended question this idea permeated the responses as they answered the question. A reason why so many of the participants saw value and importance in continuing education could be the benefits provided mainly through professional growth which is linked with a monetary increase. This is in line with current thinking as a Georgetown study found that when you obtain a graduate degree there is the ability to receive a higher income because the profession you are in will increase the salary because of the degree (Anthony P et al., 2014). An interesting piece to note in the data was the fact that the correlation between the level of education and the value of education was negative non-significant meaning that there really was no direct association between how well one was educated and if they see continuing education as valuable. Thus the

data reflects the overall idea that in general people view continuing education as valuable and that the idea is supported by the benefits it could incur. These results are also reflected in the open-ended question because as noted participants generally felt continuing education will benefit them in their career, or understand how continuing education will provide benefits for them. It should also be mentioned that while the open-ended question did provide quality responses, the lack of more open-ended questions was a feature that could be improved and in a following survey one or two more could be added to get more information and more meaningful responses. Along with that, the group sample could have also improved, because the number of individuals sampled were mostly from a college-educated background and having a wider range of educations, as well as having an increased racial and cultural diversity could have changed the results. So, in the next survey getting larger and more diverse samples would be beneficial. Want more academic – peer reviewed journal articles – in future papers.

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Appendix

3/26/2020

Qualtrics Survey Software

Block 1

Hello, welcome to the Andromache continuing education survey! Thank you for agreeing to take part in this important survey measuring interest on continuing education. Today we will be gaining your thoughts and opinions, in order to better understand the future of continuing education. This survey should only take five to ten minutes to complete. Be assured that all answers that you provide will be confidential.

Default Question Block

How old are you?

What ethnic background do you identify with most?

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic or Latinx
- ☐ Do not wish to disclose

What gender do you identify most with?

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ High school or GED
- ☐ College
- ☐ Graduate School
- ☐ Do not wish to disclose

How important do you think continuing your education is?

- ☐ Extremely important
- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Moderately important
- ☐ Slightly important
- ☐ Not at all important

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How likely are you to continue your education?

- ☐ Extremely likely
- ☐ Moderately likely
- ☐ Slightly likely
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely
- ☐ Slightly unlikely
- ☐ Moderately unlikely
- ☐ Extremely unlikely

Do you agree that continuing your education is necessary?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Do you agree continuing your education will offer financial stability?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Do you agree that continuing your education is beneficial to your career growth?

- ☐ Definitely yes
- ☐ Probably yes
- ☐ Might or might not
- ☐ Probably not
- ☐ Definitely not

Do you agree that continuing education will cause stress or other emotional tolls?

- ☐ Strongly agree

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3/26/2020

Qualtrics Survey Software

- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

How expensive do you feel the cost of continuing education is?

- ☐ Very expensive
- ☐ Expensive
- ☐ Somewhat expensive
- ☐ Moderately expensive
- ☐ Economical
- ☐ It is not expensive at all

Do you agree that there is value in continuing your education?

- ☐ Definitely yes
- ☐ Probably yes
- ☐ Might or might not
- ☐ Probably not
- ☐ Definitely not

How likely are you to continue you education in the next three years?

- ☐ Extremely likely
- ☐ Moderately likely
- ☐ Slightly likely
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely
- ☐ Slightly unlikely
- ☐ Moderately unlikely
- ☐ Extremely unlikely

How likely are you to continue your education in the next five years?

- ☐ Extremely likely
- ☐ Moderately likely
- ☐ Slightly likely
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely
- ☐ Slightly unlikely

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3/26/2020	Qualtrics Survey Software	3/26/2020	Qualtrics Survey Software
☐ Moderately unlikely ☐ Extremely unlikely		☐ Slightly likely ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely ☐ Slightly unlikely ☐ Moderately unlikely ☐ Extremely unlikely	
How likely are you to pursue a Master's degree? ☐ Extremely likely ☐ Moderately likely ☐ Slightly likely ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely ☐ Slightly unlikely ☐ Moderately unlikely ☐ Extremely unlikely		What are your final thoughts on continuing education?	
How likely are you to pursue a PhD? ☐ Extremely likely ☐ Moderately likely ☐ Slightly likely ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely ☐ Slightly unlikely ☐ Moderately unlikely ☐ Extremely unlikely		Has this survey made you consider continuing your education? ☐ Yes ☐ No	
Are you currently continuing your education? ☐		Who did you receive this survey link from? ☐ Adrianna ☐ Nadia ☐ Julian ☐ Robert	
How likely are you to continue your education online? ☐ Extremely likely ☐ Moderately likely ☐ Slightly likely ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely ☐ Slightly unlikely ☐ Moderately unlikely ☐ Extremely unlikely			
How likely are you to continue your education in a traditional setting? ☐ Extremely likely ☐ Moderately likely			
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